Tales From Japan

Welcome to *Tales From Japan*, a collection of letters written to you, my brothers and sisters in Christ. I will share my experiences and thoughts as I journey through the process of going on my very first mission trip ever on **June 24-July 9**! Nerve racking yes, but so exciting! I pray that each letter will be a blessing to you in some way as you read about what I'm going through before, during, and after the trip. I also pray that each letter will be a witness to what God is doing not only in my life but in the world!

I want to thank you for your support in prayer and finances. I wouldn't be here without you. You yourself may not be going to Japan, but through your partnership you are a vital part of this mission, and I want to remind you of that! I'd like to think that it's not just me and the 5 other people on my team that are heading to Japan, but rather an entire community that is with us in spirit. Now that's pretty cool :)

Okay okay enough of this introduction. Let me end off with a quote, and really my prayer, as I continue to wrestle with the worries and uncertainties at hand.

"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee… May he keep me ever thus, simply depending on Him for every blessing, temporal as well as spiritual." (Hudson Taylor)

Enjoy *Tales From Japan*.
A special feature in the Futuresight Archive presented to you by Barak Project.

Kill The Flesh,
Jaime

May 12, 2024

Letter 1: A Lost Generation (April 2, 2024)

I'm writing this in case you would like to know more about why I want to go on this trip, beyond what the support raising letter says. No one told me to write this, it's just extra. I figured if I wrote from my heart (and with my own writing style), this could be a bit more real, and you'll get to know me better :) And please feel free to reach out to talk! This mission trip means a lot to me, and I'm more and more passionate about its work as each week passes.

When I was in grade 11/12, I wanted to be a missionary lol because my experiences in my faith made my heart passionate for reaching the lost. At the time, I wanted to reach the skateboarding community. I knew and experienced their struggles, and wanted them to find lasting joy that couldn't be found in the very worldly lifestyle that skaters often live. I didn't get much support from others, so I went into uni (which is still a massive blessing). (Side note: I don't think my prayers all those years ago were forgotten, I think God will use me for some cool things within the skateboarding community soon… oops spoilers!).

Throughout my university years, I wrestled with my faith which I found out wasn't built on a strong foundation, thus I was truly born again only in April 2022 in my second year of uni. My heart became on fire for God and I felt called to help bring people together through Christ. You get to see a bit of that at CCF (my university fellowship) and JTM (the men's discipleship group I lead). I really do love the people there and have been committed to pouring into the fellowship this past year especially (with the amount of time I spend related to these things, it seems like I'm majoring in campus ministry and minoring in kinesiology LOL).

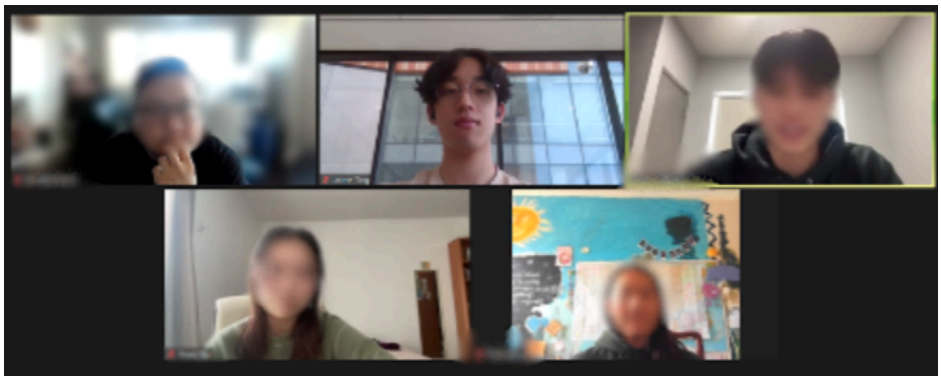
UTM Campus Christian Fellowship (left) // Men's Group Retreat in May 2024 (right)

But I feel called by God to do much more than this, and reach those who aren't Christian at all and show them the love of Jesus (this passion increased tenfold with my conversations with Muslims and Jesus Awareness Week in March). If I had the chance to be on the CCF committee, I'd honestly probably run for Evangelism Coordinator (although I love just being the men's group leader). I don't talk about this much, but sometimes I can't sleep at night thinking about these things. When I look at the crowds downtown, my heart is shattered knowing many of them feel hopeless, lost, and alone. And I don't think it's just me feeling this, but the Spirit placing this on my heart, because I'm naturally a selfish person (and this is years of discernment of whether my passion for the lost is from God or from my own selfish desires).

When I got offered the opportunity to go on this mission trip to Japan in January, I saw it as God opening a door and all I had to do was walk through. So I jumped at the chance of going. As I researched more about Japan and its spiritual climate, including the absence of

Jesus but also the few small local churches that have been grinding away sharing the Gospel there, I felt immensely encouraged and knew there was something special here. As I prayed over the past few months, I wondered at the possibilities of this trip. What role could I play in the awakening of Japan? And whether I have a big impact or not (however that is measured by humans lol :P), I know that this trip will be personally eye opening to what it means to serve and glorify God. I've previously been restricted in my view of God through a narrow Western lens with experiences in my church, youth ministry, summer camp, and campus fellowship - all of which are no doubt amazing! But God will definitely show me new ways to serve and worship Him, especially learning how to obey the Great Commission, within a new culture and working with a team of students.

To be honest, I don't fully know what may happen after the result of this trip. God may really call me to Japan for longer, I have no idea. If He does, I wouldn't be surprised, because like I said, my heart is for reaching this lost generation. And if I stay in the GTA, I know I will have a new perspective on faith that will influence how I interact and serve in whatever future places I go, whether my church, a young adults group, my youth group, or even CCF in some capacity.



Mission trip team online meeting in March 2024

Throughout this journey since January when I got the offer to go, I definitely had doubts and worries. That's just what I do (and that's why Barak in the Bible is so deeply relatable and means so much to me - yes, when I say he's my favorite Bible character, it's not a joke; I could write an essay on this guy that no one's heard of). I worried mostly about the finances. Who will actually partner with me? Am I worth their money? Will I get enough? And if I don't, how will people see me? Like a fool? But I'm praying and learning to trust God here. How God sees me is different than how I see myself. I don't have the "guarantee" that I'll reach my financial goals, but I know God will make a way if He wants me to go. While I still have to take action and try to "gather the manna", it's God who sends it and provides. And for that, I am reminded that it is by his grace that any of this is happening. *"Not to us, Lord, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness." (Psalm 115:1)*

So here we are. At the end of this big wall of text. If you've made it to the end, I humbly appreciate you and your interest in me and the mission trip. I also want to thank you for your impact in my life. This is because, believe it or not ;) if you've received my letter, that means you've had some level of influence in shaping me into who I am today. So whether or not you decide to partner with me - in prayer or finances - I am extremely grateful for you, sometimes I just don't get the chance to say it.

Kill The Flesh,
Jaime

Letter 2: What I'm Wrestling With (May 12, 2024)

It's January 2024, and I'm receiving a call from a friendly face I met half a year ago at Campus Challenge, a conference held by Ambassadors For Christ (AFC) to equip university students to better serve their fellowships and campuses. Quach asked me how school and life has been. Then out of nowhere, he asked me if I'd be interested in joining him and some students on a mission trip to Japan. Like what?! I did not expect that! As he asked me to prayerfully consider, I was already so excited about the prospects of traveling across the world to serve God in a new way…

Campus Challenge in May 2023

As the weeks passed, I prayed about this opportunity by myself. I was so excited to go, but was worried about what others may think. Would my parents even allow me to go? How in the world would I raise the money?! But even with all the doubts, something deep inside me told me that this was a door God was opening and all I had to do was walk through. So eventually I told Quach I was in and officially signed up, paying the application fee.

February became March, and I got caught up in the student life… but it's not what you're thinking. Although I was trekking back and forth from Toronto every single day and studying sport medicine and exercise psychology with little sleep, my mind and heart was occupied with my Christian fellowship: UTM CCF. I knew it was my last semester with them, so I went to every Friday night fellowship, almost every Thursday prayer night, every Thursday men's group, and even met up 1 on 1 with them other days of the week. If I wasn't in class, studying, volunteering, or working, I was spending time with God and being with CCF, or thinking about and preparing for it LOL!

CCF "Not Of This World" Retreat in February 2024

Why am I saying all this? Well, it's because I was so focused on serving and spending time with CCF, that I didn't actually have much time to think about the mission trip! Quach also trained me on how to fundraise, but I was worrying so much! There was no way anyone would be willing to give me financial support. I'm doomed.

And then bam. I got my first financial partnership. It pretty much blew my mind, and got me sitting teary eyed at midnight as I read over the text again and again. I couldn't believe it. Not only was it the first time I ever got money fundraising, but it was *A LOT* of money. And it was from a dear friend. I had my doubts and worries, but God made it clear that He was with me and He'd provide. As I gave out more support raising letters and made more partnerships, I got to see such generous and kind hearts, tangible evidence of God's provision like nothing I've ever experienced. I'm not even in Japan, but this journey has already been so eye opening.

Through the past few months, I've also gotten to meet with my team every so often. Online. But still blessed!! However, May 9 came, and we all got to finally meet in-person! Truly a memorable moment. We shared some thoughts on our "Journey Guide" Devotional/Journal over pizza, read a ton of Bible passages, and prayed over the needs of Japan.

First In-Person Meeting!!! (From left to right: me, Quach, Anne, Lucy, Anita, Will)

Will taking a picture of me taking a picture of the beautiful sky but really just me taking a picture of the reflection on the glass window :/

Here's two things that have been on my mind as I've had more time to pray about the mission trip in the past month:

1. I've become slightly confused as to why God is calling me to go on this mission trip. For a long time, I thought this would be an incredible opportunity to learn new ways to serve and glorify God outside of serving in Sunday school, youth ministry, summer camp, and campus fellowship. And by all means, I'm sure it will! But I wonder why Japan? Why does He want me there? I've been asking God about this, but still feel uncertain. With Barak Project, I've felt more called to the West. But Quach mentioned something interesting. Maybe God wants to confirm in me some things about my heart and calling, not about mission trips and Japan (but I wouldn't be closed off to that idea). I'm going to continue to wrestle with this.

2. *"But how to get faith strengthened? Not by striving after faith, but by resting on the faithful one" (McCarthy, a friend of Hudson Taylor).* I've been reflecting on whether I am relying on who I am or who God is. I've been learning what it means to wait and rest in God even without all the answers and in the midst of uncertainty. This resting in His presence is something I've got to experience with the amount of prayer and silence and solitude in the past 3 weeks. What a blessing. And I feel like this is just a taste! God is good. *"His love is unfailing, His Word unchangeable, His power ever the same; therefore the heart that trusts Him is kept in "perfect peace." … I know He tries me only to increase my faith, and that it is all in love. Well, if He is glorified, I am content" (Hudson Taylor in Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret pg. 45)*. So no matter the worries and struggles as I approach the day of leaving for Japan, I can rest knowing God is faithful to the end.

I'll be spending the next few weeks journaling, learning about Japan, reading *Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret*, reading the Bible, praying, and working. If you would like to talk about the mission trip or anything in life, feel free to reach out! I'd be honored to be in your presence :) Thank you for reading and journeying alongside me, I'll see you in the next letter.

Kill The Flesh,
Jaime

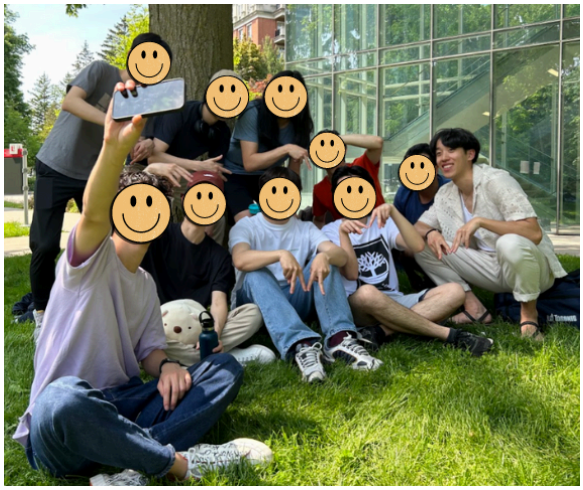
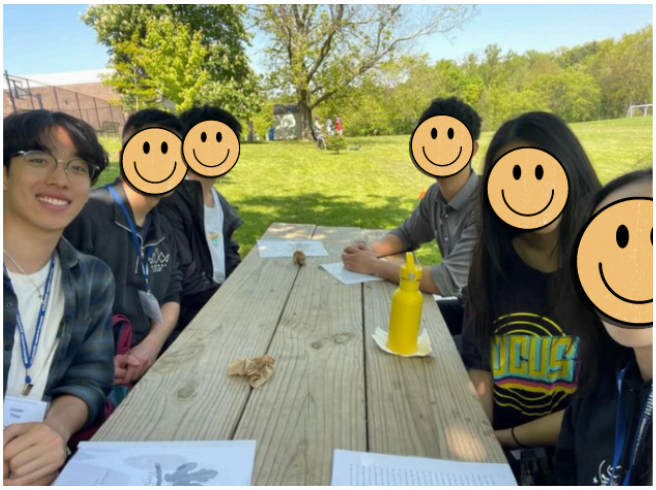
Letter 3: Perfect And Complete (May 28, 2024)

Man. Jeez. Sheesh. What. Woah. Wow. Ok. Okay. O. K. Alright. Alright. Alright ;) What a blessed weekend!!! Where do I even start?! I was able to attend AFC's Campus Challenge on May 17-20 with UTM CCF!! Just when I thought this year couldn't get any better, boom CC dropped into my lap. A weekend spent focusing on God with my friends alongside other brothers and sisters in Christ from other universities… you can't top that.

CC was a much different experience than last year for me. I'm a graduate now, so my goals for coming to CC were a lot different. I didn't feel called to talk and get to know every single person like I did last year. And with being a graduate, how could I even apply what I've learned in serving the fellowship if I'm just gonna be gone next year? To be honest, I wrestled a lot about why I was even there. Sure, I got to lead a small group everyday. Sure, I got to deepen my relationships with UTM CCF. Sure, my mission trip team was there. But even so, I didn't really know why *I* was there. It saddened me to be graduating, in the back of my mind knowing that all these people I met this weekend, I'll probably never see again :'(

Campus Challenge 2024 Group Picture

Even so, CC has been a 10/10 experience (minus well make it a 100/10). I feel so blessed. It was *so good*. Our small group discussions were enlightening. My group members were so understanding, patient, graceful, and insightful. Jumping and singing "I Thank God" and "Praise" at midnight with like 30 other people I didn't know too well yet were united in worship was soul-filling. Eating (definitely-very-spicy-it-was-not-just-me-and-my-extremely-low-spice-tolerance) noodles with UTM CCF til 5am was an otherworldly experience as my mind faded in and out of consciousness. Just every moment learning, praying, eating, talking, worshiping, and sweating with my brothers and sisters was a blessing and a constant experience of God's love and presence. Once again, my favorite part of a Christian event is the relationships I shared with my brothers and sisters. Moments I hope to cherish for the rest of my life.

Just The Men - a mix of UTM, UTSC, UTSG, and Guelph students (left) // My amazing small group! (right)

But of course, that's not to say that I didn't "learn" anything. The theme of CC this year was "Perfect and Complete" after the book of James. I was challenged in many ways, but the one thing that stuck out to me in particular was James 4:13-17. Oftentimes, I make plans and have dreams and goals for the future, and do so without a thought about God. *"Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that'" (James 4:15).* How many times do I say *"I will follow you wherever you go" (Luke 9:57)*, while still clinging to my dreams and hopes? How can I say that I trust God when it's so hard for me to let go of control? I often focus on increasing my riches, status, material possessions, and comparing with others. But James taught me that the development of virtues (the fruit of the spirit), wisdom, and faith alongside deeds is 1000x more valuable. "Who am I becoming?"

So what are my actionable applications of this lesson? Well, I am going to be very intentional with my quiet time with God moving forward. I'm going to set aside extended quality time each day where I can pray, listen, sit in silence and solitude, meditate, and journal. It's honestly not so much as doing, but *being* with God. Yeah, that sounds stupid and a waste of time to a lot of people, but *"If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ" (Galatians 1:10)*. I need to learn to give my desires to God and truly let him guide me, "listen listen listen" to distinguish/discern between my Fleshly desires and God's will. Nothing else can satisfy my needs/desires but God alone. *"Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you" (Psalm 73:25).* With more time dedicated to being with God, I believe that I will become more like Him. The goal is so that no matter the outcome of any situation, I can say with confidence that "God is so good to me."

Sorry, I know there's not much "mission trip" stuff in this letter, but I think these are important experiences and lessons that God has placed along my journey to Japan. I continue to wrestle with why God is calling me to Japan and how this mission trip will impact/affirm my calling and faith. However, as the doubts and worries come, I know *"that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing" (James 1:3-4)*.

Worship Session at CC (left) // UTM CCF dinner after CC! (right)

Short Story: Street Prayer & Origami

It's April 30 - yeah I know, a month ago, but this is a dope story! I was at Campus Worship (@campus.worship) downtown and just had an incredible time, shoutout to my brother Sejin! I cried way too much because God is so good to me and ate some weird spicy sandwich that devastated my tongue, but what was so memorable was meeting a new friend (who's probably reading this right now <3). He said he was heading out on a mission trip to Ottawa in a week!!! I was like, "No way! I'm also going on a mission trip - but to Japan!" We talked for some time and walked through the dark streets, sharing our thoughts of our mission trips. And then we prayed for each other, standing there on the sidewalk as people passed by. We literally just met 20 minutes earlier, and here we are praying with genuine love and care for each other as brothers in Christ. As we turned to leave, he pulled out something from his backpack - a little square of origami that he meant to give to someone earlier that day but didn't get the chance to. Instead, he gave it to me. *"Dear Lea, God bless you! -Emmanuel Wong"* it says with numerous Bible passages all over. As I left him behind to catch my bus, I took him with me in heart and spirit. A chance encounter yet so divine. A short interaction yet a memory of a lifetime.

How you can pray for me:

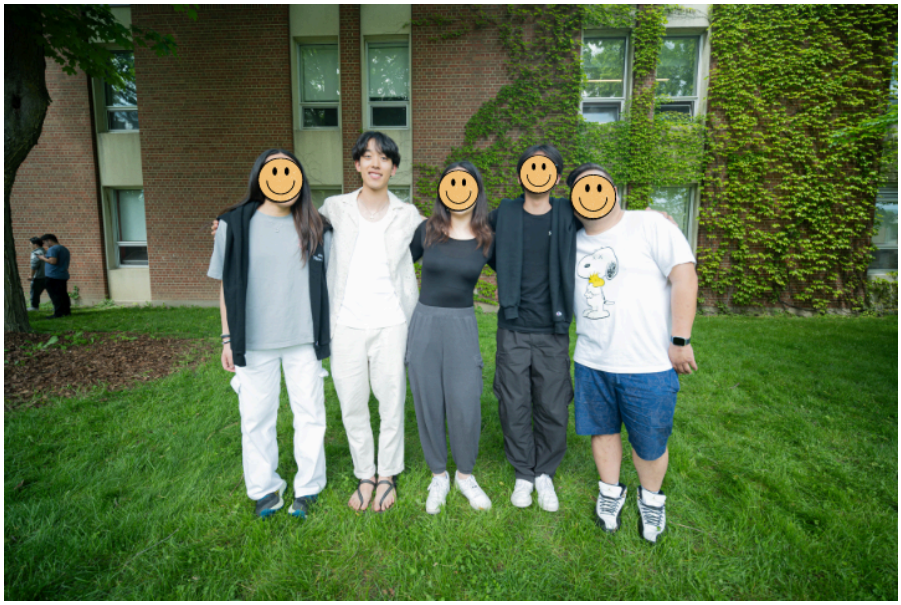
- That I can prepare my heart posture to be ready for the mission trip on June 24.
- That I can experience God's love for me that fully satisfies my deepest longings/desires.
- That I can remain steadfast in prayer and wait on God in the midst of uncertainties.
- That I can be formed into the image of Christ so that my automatic response in every situation (no matter how frustrating or hurting) is love.

How you can pray for Japan:

- That Japanese people would find their most authentic belonging and identity in God, not the rituals popular to Shinto and Buddhist influences.
- That Japanese people facing stress and pressures may find grace and acceptance in Christ instead of negative coping mechanisms.
- That Japanese believers would be strengthened and persevere under the challenges that persist against the struggling and dying churches.

Here we are at the end of another letter! If you would like to talk about the mission trip or anything in life, feel free to reach out! I'd be honored to be in your presence :) Thank you for reading and journeying alongside me, I'll see you in the next letter.

Kill The Flesh,
Jaime



My mission trip team!!! Anita, me, Anne, Will, and Quach!

Letter 4: Slave And Monk (June 2, 2024)

I'm lying underneath a pine tree. Its lower branches whip my face. Just another hour of shoveling dead pine needles into brown bags. How pleasant! And what a waste of time. I grumble as blood drips down my arm. What a job. I feel like I'm just trading my time for money. Just working like a slave and treated like a slave.

But guess what? God's changed my view of it recently. Can you believe it's *not* really a waste of time? But *exactly* what I need right now? In a season where I desperately need quiet time to pray and be with God, I got landscaping. It's not 8 hours of trimming 90s (although I'm an absolute pro at it). It's 8 hours of prayer and worship. Every single day. Find me a job that I can literally be payed to pray. And now we see landscaping has an infinite value!! I've practiced making every thought into a prayer, with moments of silence and contemplation, sprinkled with Scripture during my breaks. Work like a slave. Pray like a monk.

Mission trip team meeting on May 30

Now let's take this letter into a different direction. It's May 30. I'm with my mission trip team for a meeting. Everyone's in the room, including Anne who's calling in from China! We share and talk about our spiritual gifts and personality types to better understand our team. The spiritual gifts quiz gave me Shepherding, Mercy Giving, and Teaching as my top 3 gifts. Since spiritual gifts is a new topic for me, I can't say I agree with the results, but Shepherding does seem pretty fitting. I genuinely do have a great love and concern for those God puts in my circle and have a desire to exhort and be there for them. But while I do have heart, I don't always know how or have the courage to translate that love into action. It's a gift that I'm working on developing.

For the personality test, I got ENFJ-T (Protagonist), which was pretty surprising because I always got Introverted in the past few years! I've definitely become more social this school year due to the nature of many of my classes, networking downtown, and being more intentional at my fellowship. But do I get energized by being with people or being by myself? Honestly, I think it's a bit of both. I really desire being in community and I also really desire having my solo quiet time. I guess some people would call me an "Ambivert." But besides that, Protagonists are described as "inspiring optimists, readily taking action to do what they feel is right", "people who lead by example", "motivate others", and "bring out the potential in others." I think that describes me lol:P but like Lucy pointed out, you can't truly describe someone with only 4 letters.

I have a deep passion to be someone that can uplift those I shepherd, but I'm not really good at it. I'm actually not good at anything in life. I'm an extremely slow learner and anything that I've become "good" at is because of focused discipline and intentional learning of the skill over *many* years (and of course by God's grace), oftentimes at the sacrifice of everything else in life. For example, when I skateboarded, it took me a year to learn an ollie and another year to learn a kickflip. I did absolutely nothing else in my life throughout high school (not exaggerating) to learn switch treflips, noseslide nollieflips, and ghetto birds. Similarly, this year, I tried to be there more for my fellowship and JTM (men's discipleship group), but I made so many mistakes along the way and I'm still learning about and developing my spiritual gifts and calling.

Sharing about my mission trip at Renew Church on May 26!

At Christmas time last year, I was invited to a dinner with my church's meal team (because I would help out with the garbage LOL). When they asked me what I wanted to do after graduation, this was my answer: "I'm going to change the world." Hopefully this response gives you a better sense of who I am. Ever since I was born again in April 2022, I have been burdened with a mission and vision. It intrigues me that my spiritual gifts and personality type now align with what I feel called to do. However, I still feel like I need more clarity from God in affirming my spiritual gifts and calling (even though I've gotten a lot of confirmation in the past 2 years). That's part of the reason why I think God is leading me to Japan for a mission trip.

But you're probably thinking, "You're naive. When are you going to come back to reality?" Well, my Flesh hopes you're right! Because I would *much* rather live with the comforts of material possessions, know that I have a stable future, and be finally validated by others, than venture forward towards a calling and life path that has not been paved and with neither map nor guide to aid me. And yet if you know me, you know that I Kill The Flesh. So there's really only one way forward for me.

"It was this that drew Hudson Taylor… "I must work the works of him that sent me"... It was not enough to go to the highways and byways of Shanghai. Others were already doing that to some extent. His heart was burdened with a sense of responsibility for those beyond - those who never had heard the way of salvation, who never could hear unless the truth were brought to them by Christ-filled messengers. So nothing held him back…" (Dr. & Mrs. Howard Taylor in Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret pg. 61)

However, this all hinges on whether I'm discerning God's will for my life correctly. I will continue to pray like a monk at work in the coming weeks. I'm praying that God can give me more clarity on my vocation and affirm and develop my spiritual gifts. And throughout all this, I pray that my heart may be kept from selfish ambition and vain conceit, that I may let go of control of my ideas and hopes for the future, and that I may rely on the wisdom and love of God. Whether or not I live out what I currently feel called to do, I earnestly pray daily that God can be glorified in my life, and I can rest assured knowing that He will have me where He wants me when I continue to yield to his leading. I believe God can use my trip to Japan as a key stepping stone within a larger story.

"The harvest here is indeed great, and the labourers are few and imperfectly fitted, without much grace, for such a work. And yet, grace can make a few feeble instruments the means of accomplishing great things - things greater even than we can conceive." (William Burns in Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret pg. 74)

That's it for this letter! If you would like to talk about the mission trip or anything in life, feel free to reach out! I'd be honored to be in your presence :) Thank you for reading and journeying alongside me. You are loved <3

Kill The Flesh,
Jaime

Letter 5: Under Pressure (June 12, 2024)

I thought prayer was supposed to be "civil." You use well-thought-out, structured sentences and proper grammar. You do it while sitting peacefully, kneeling at the bedside, or before your next meal… So why are my prayers so disjointed, often filled with broken sentences, sighs, and grunts? Why do I sometimes let out cries of anguish and primal screams? Why are there often gaps of silence and lifeless stares into the abyss? Why does my heart and breath shake and yearn? Why do tears of pain and anger fill my eyes? How can I have prayers of joy and gratitude one day, and the next, prayers of lament, pain, doubt, and frustration? How can I feel like God is right here with me, and then feel like my prayers are left unheard? Why do I feel so discouraged?

"During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him." (Hebrews 5:7-10)

Prayer Sesh with Will on June 5

Our mission trip team made prayer partners, and so me and Will are meeting together each week! We got to hang out for an hour sharing about what's going on in our lives and praying. Interestingly, we're going through similar situations in life, and we've been able to support and encourage each other in that. As we are 1.5 weeks away from leaving for Japan, we're both wrestling with balancing our time between mission trip prep and personal life. We're both trying to be intentional and mindful of our heart posture through prayer, reading Scripture and books, and learning more about Japan.

During my time spent fighting demons and wrestling God, He has graciously taught me some important lessons. I think Hudson Taylor and J.I. Packer say it better than I can…

"Trouble should always be treated as a call to consider one's ways, but trouble is not necessarily a sign of being off track at all: for as the Bible declares in general that 'many are the afflictions of the righteous,' so it teaches in particular that following God's guidance regularly leads to upsets and distresses which one would otherwise have escaped… The Christian's guided life may appear as a waste - as with Paul, spending years in prison because he followed God's guidance… Nor does God always tell us the why and wherefore of the frustrations and losses which are part and parcel of the guided life." (J.I. Packer in Knowing God pg. 272-273)

"So if God should place me in serious perplexity, must He not give me much guidance; in positions of great difficulty, much grace; in circumstances of great pressure and trial, much strength? No fear that His resources will prove unequal to the emergency! And His resources are mine, for He is mine, and is with me and dwells in me." (Hudson Taylor in Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret pg. 165)

"For the one who had permitted the troubles to come had also made provision in His own wonderful way." (Dr. & Mrs. Howard Taylor in Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret pg. 149)

"Grace is God drawing us sinners closer and closer to himself… by exposing us to all these things, so as to overwhelm us with a sense of our own inadequacy, and to drive us to cling to him more closely." (J.I. Packer in Knowing God pg. 284)

"It doesn't matter, really, how great the pressure is, it only matters where the pressure lies. See that it never comes between you and the Lord - then, the greater the pressure, the more it presses you to His breast." (Hudson Taylor in Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret pg. 153)

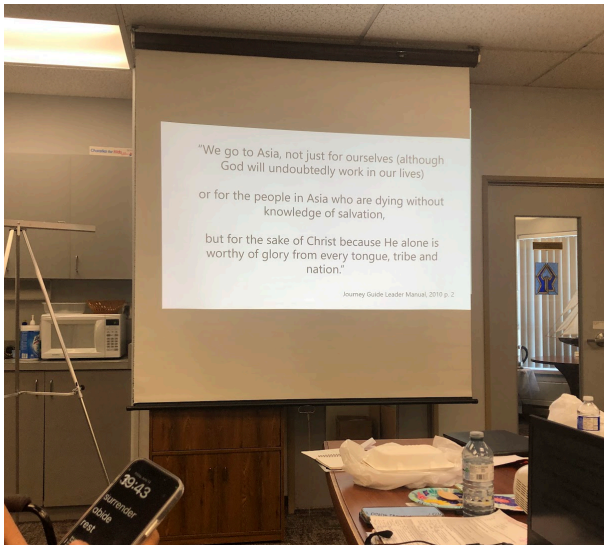
Life is hard, God is good. I may face pressures from many trials, but no matter how difficult, God is not just with me but in me, for *"it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Galatians 2:20)*. Does not the Spirit who had the power to raise Jesus from the dead live in me and give me strength *(Romans 8:11)*? Has Jesus not promised to abide with me - never to leave me, never to fail me *(John 15)*? *"If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31)* While I don't know all the answers, He gives just enough clarity for my next step, and that's where I'll trust Him, for *"Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path" (Psalm 119:105)*. I may have wrestled with God in discouragement and frustration, but praise God, for you cannot wrestle with someone without also drawing closer to them! The devil meant this for evil, but God meant it for good *(Genesis 50:20)*. I can now count each trial as pure joy *(James 1:2-4)*, as I learn to lean on God and not my own understanding *(Proverbs 3:5-6)*. And even when it is tough to trust Him at first, it is by His grace alone that I'm given the strength to do so. *"In the crushing, in the pressing, You are making new wine" (New Wine, Hillsong Worship)*.

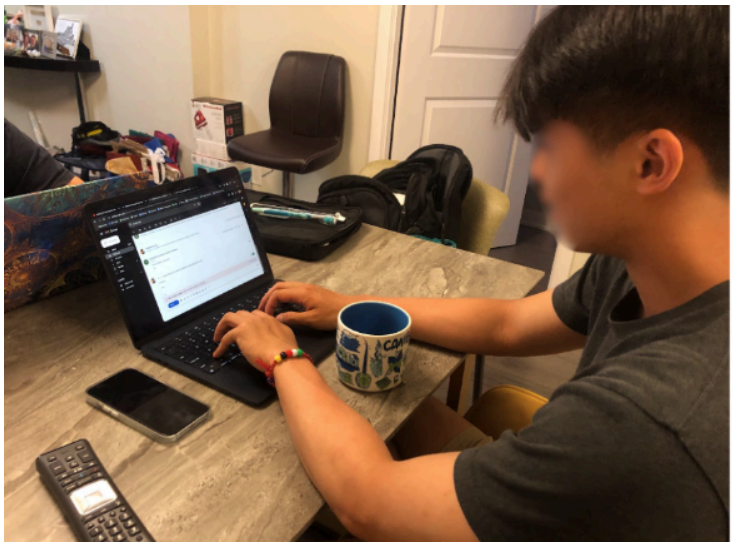
That's the end of this letter, but not the end of my journey with God! I also wanted to notify you that I am FULLY FUNDRAISED!!! 🥳🥳 I have not only reached my goal of $4150 but SURPASSED IT!!! 🤯 All glory to God! Thank you to everyone who has supported me financially and shown me overwhelming generosity and kindness 😭 I could not be more grateful! 🙏 God has proven once again that He can provide for me, despite my many worries. I'm humbled by the ways in which God is refining me by fire in preparation for the mission trip (and life!). *Vincit qui patitur.* Lastly, please pray for our mission trip team who will have training this weekend!! Thanks again for reading and journeying alongside me. You are loved ❤️

Kill The Flesh,
Jaime

Letter 6: Great Expectations (June 17, 2024)

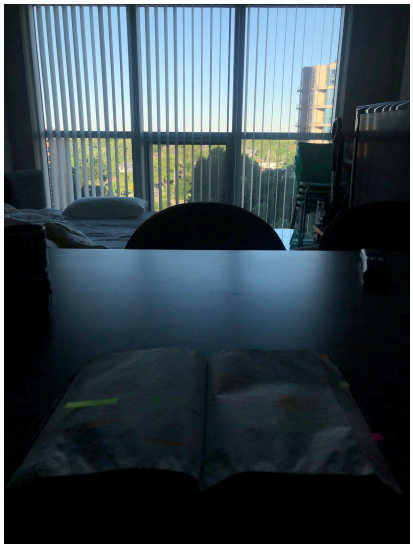
Konnichiwa! We're **ONE WEEK AWAY** from leaving for Japan! What was merely an idea a few months ago, is now almost a reality! A lot has happened in the last week, but let's make this letter short and sweet (for the first time lol) and just focus on the mission trip prep. On Friday, we materialized at the OMF office and began our weekend training. Not only was there a lot of food and snacks (ty Lucy!), but there was also lots of content covered. I personally enjoyed hearing my team's life maps/testimonies and learning about the different ways we can be involved in the Great Commission outside of going as a missionary (including prayer, hospitality, support, learning, and "mobilizing the troops").


"We go to Asia, not just for ourselves (although God will undoubtedly work in our lives)
or for the people in Asia who are dying without knowledge of salvation,
but for the sake of Christ because He alone is worthy of glory from every tongue, tribe and nation."
Journey Guide Leader Manual, 2010 p. 2



OMF Orientation Training (top) // Me and Will undergoing trials at midnight LOL (bottom)

When we got back to Lucy's place (who graciously let me and Will stay over for the night), we learned about what it means to fear Quach and Lucy and rely on God's faithfulness and provision 😂 Administrative work is not our thing I guess. Fortunately, *"where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (Romans 5:20)*. It seems like we won't be leaving Will behind in Canada LOL! After much prayer and (frankly, much more) selfies, we went to sleep at 1am.



Much gratitude for Lucy and David for hosting and serving us! The breakfast was legendary.

On Saturday, we had a full day of sessions led by OMF staff on topics like understanding team dynamics and tendencies, conflict resolution, expectations and flexibility, crossing cultures, and spiritual warfare. I feel like my brain expanded like a melon, and I'm even more excited for what Japan has in store for us! 😊 Big shout out to Kyle, Sam, and Deborah who went on a prayer journey in Japan last year and graciously shared their experiences and advice with us!

OMF Orientation Training complete! ✅ // Will & TMU friends also found by surprise at Dons at 10pm :D

I'm dedicating the next 7 days before Japan to mission trip preparation. So far, I've been reflecting on my expectations. Deep inside, I believe I expect God to do some big, life-changing things, whatever they may be. I also hope that God will give me clarity on my vocation and affirm my spiritual gifts. I have these hopes and expectations, but what if reality turns out differently? How would I react? The response that I have to unmet expectations can reveal my true focus and heart posture. Maybe my heart is not as open to what God wants to show me in Japan than I thought…

As I navigate my expectations, I also found some doubts - such as whether I'm the right pick for the team. I feel like a wild card. Will I just be a dead weight? Will I contribute anything? Maybe I can have a servant's heart, but what if I just lack the skills and abilities to do anything of significance? As I mull over these thoughts, I am encouraged by Hudson Taylor who humbly said, *"I often think that God must have been looking for someone small enough and weak enough for Him to use, and that He found me." (Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret pg. 205)*

Prayer Requests:

- Praise to God for the many individuals from OMF and AFC who showed me overwhelming love, grace, and generosity this weekend <3
- Preparing my heart to give my undivided attention to Jesus, Japan, and my team in the coming weeks.
- Remaining steadfast in prayer and waiting on God as I work through my expectations and doubts.

Another letter comes to a close! Let us remember Jesus who said, *"Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5)*. *"And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20)*. What a promise and what a God we know and serve! Thanks again for reading and journeying alongside me. You are loved ❤️‍🩹

Kill The Flesh,
Jaime

Letter 7: 2-4AM (June 24, 2024)

~ Part I. Bonding.

If you're reading this, that means **we're on a plane to Japan!** ✈️ The time has come! Over the past week, I've been busy preparing with the team. It has honestly been such a blessing. Besides doing last minute shopping and reading some handbooks/guides, I've been waking up every morning to meet with my team online for prayer meetings! Going through *Beneath The Surface* (a prayer book for Japan) with the team each day has opened my heart and mind to the needs of Japan and the power of being united in prayer *(Acts 1:14)*. It's easy to shrug off praying and doubt its "value" for the time we spend, especially in our consumerist culture, but remember, *"Prayer does not equip us for the greater work - prayer is the greater work" (Oswald Chambers). "The past has not exhausted the possibilities nor the demands for doing great things for God… The greatest benefactor this age could have is the man who will bring the teachers and the church back to prayer" (E.M. Bounds).*

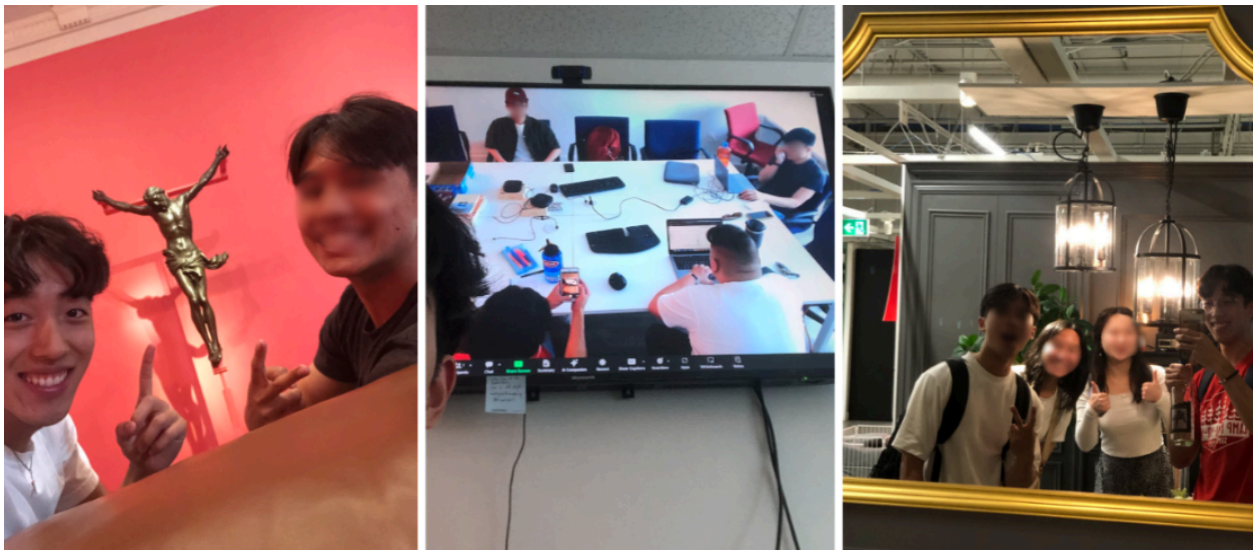
Ways To Pray For Japan

- Pray for Japanese people who are facing social pressures and stress to put their faith in Christ and receive his grace and peace.
- Pray that seeking mental health care would lose its current stigma in Japan, and that Christian counselors and the church can be properly equipped to minister to those who are struggling.
- Pray for Christian student ministries like HGK to continue to care for and mentor young people and raise a generation who have joy in Christ and courage to share their faith.
- Pray for Japanese pastors who ~50% are over the age of 70. May they be steadfast and be equipped to shepherd and mobilize younger people for leadership and discipleship.

9am Daily Prayer Meetings for Japan (left) // Daily 1 Thessalonians Devos (right)

While prayer may not be as common these days, I aspire to be a *"man of prayer" (Psalm 109:4). "As for me, I watch in hope for the Lord, I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me" (Micah 7:7)*. Just look at the exemplar of prayer in Hudson Taylor, in whom *"there was a simplicity, a tenderness, a boldness, a power that hushed and subdued me, and made it clear that God had admitted him to the inner circle of His friendship. Such praying was evidently the outcome of long tarrying in the secret place, and was as dew from the Lord" (Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret pg. 191)*. How many are able to say the same for themselves?

The students on the team also decided to do daily devos through 1 Thessalonians (shoutout to Anne for the recommendation!). Reading this epistle with a missional lens has been eye opening. I have a greater awareness of how to approach this trip with the right heart posture and how to live out my faith in Japan in a way that points others to Christ. As a short term mission trip, our potential impact is limited considering the language and time constraints. But we still hope to be an encouragement and support for the believers and non-believers through our actions and expressions. At the end of the day, whatever I'm called to do, I will do it all for the glory of God *(1 Corinthians 10:31)*.



Me and Will with Jesus at the AGO (left) // AFC Staff Prayer Meeting (middle) // Exploring Ikea (right)

Team bonding over Scripture and prayer has been so fun, but I also thank God for the many opportunities where we could bond over other things this week. We ate brunch downtown and got to know each other better. Me and Will also went to the Art Gallery of Ontario, looked at maybe 3 rooms, and then sat down on a couch in front of Jesus to talk for the rest of the time LOL. On another day after an AFC staff prayer meeting, we walked to Ikea for devos before eating dinner together. On Saturday night, we even spent a couple hours on a call while we packed our luggage at midnight. Really grateful for any time spent with Anne, Anita, and Will!

Brunch with the team (left) // Devos in Ikea!! (right)

~ Part II. Candlelight.

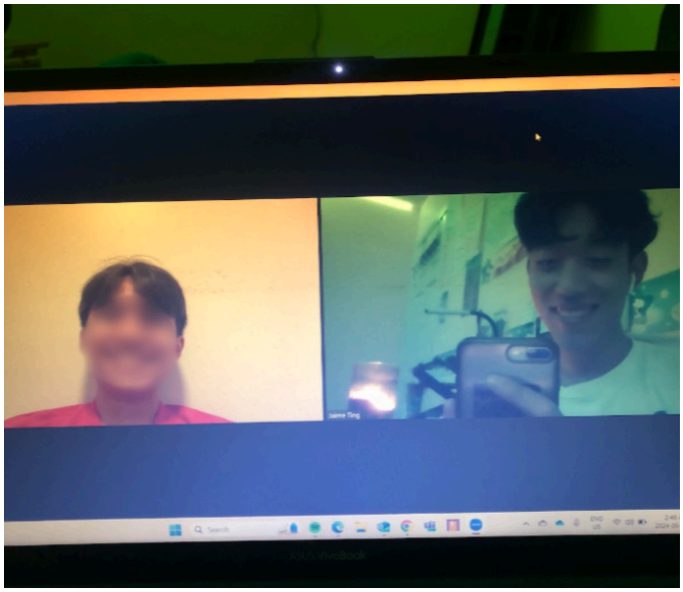
Time. Something I need. And yet also something I seem to never have enough of. Why don't I get enough time to do the things I plan? Why do I feel like I'm always playing against the clock? Time has never been on my side. While seasons change, I'm still at odds against time in what seems like every life stage. And when I look back, I can't help but wonder, "Was it God's will? Or did I screw up the opportunities and time God gave me which brought me here?" It hurts to think that choices that are made in seconds can have lasting consequences. That thought discourages me, weighs me down… beckons me to give up. And yet, *"What's happened, happened, it's an expression of faith in the mechanics of the world, it's not an excuse for doing nothing" (Neil in Tenet)*. Maybe there is some truth to my musings on time, but maybe my perspective is tainted by a cultural lens that has shaped not only my values but my reactions to reality. Right now I can't say for sure, but even in the midst of feelings of defeat, there is a part of me that holds onto hope, "Is there grace?" And just like Barak, against all odds, by faith my weakness can be turned to strength, in the face of adversity I can still say, "Just one more step" *(Judges 4:14-16, Hebrews 11:32-34)*.

But that doesn't answer everything now, does it? Admirable, but mistaken. Even with a desire to spend more time with God, those plans can be thrown out the window when you're hit in the face by the busyness of life. Just this week, it seemed like I was rushing from one thing to the next, with very little time to slow down and wait on God. Fortunately, I found a "solution." If there's no time in the day, then I'm going to have to make time in the night…

"Well do the writers remember traveling with him month after month in northern China, by cart and wheelbarrow, with the poorest of inns at night. Often with only one large room for coolies and travelers alike, they would screen off a corner for their father and another for themselves, with curtains of some sort; and then, after sleep at last had brought a measure of quiet, they would hear a match struck and see the flicker of candlelight which told that Mr. Taylor, however weary, was poring over the little Bible in two volumes always at hand. From two to four A. M. was the time he usually gave to prayer, the time when he could be most sure of being undisturbed to wait upon God. That flicker of candlelight has meant more to them than all they have read or heard on secret prayer; it meant reality, not preaching but practice." (Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret pg. 239)

Just another reason for why Hudson Taylor has quickly skyrocketed to become one of my top influences. What a legend. I would be humbled to even have a fraction of his spirit. Only now am I learning the value of that flicker of candlelight in the late hours. There truly is nothing that can get between me and God in that time. Not even myself. My spirit becomes hungry as I pore over the waterlogged pages of my children's Bible. My thoughts become connected as I write line after line in my journal. My mind becomes focused as I pray my heart out to the Father. How many times have I waited on God at 2-4AM? Let's just say that's between me and God ;) but I can tell you it's at least once because I got to do it with Will the night before we flew to Japan!

After taking a 40 minute nap, I woke up to meet Will online at 2AM. We talked about many things, and I felt encouraged by his thoughts and questions. One thing that stuck out to me was the idea of time and how *"there is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens" (Ecclesiastes 3:1)*. Many things may be on my mind, but in this season I should be putting this mission trip first and thinking about how to further God's kingdom in everything I do. Everything else can wait, not that they're unimportant, but that it's not their time yet. If God's calling me on a mission now, then I will pursue that mission with my whole being.



2-4AM with Will. We also prayed Psalms 116-118, shoutout to BNH <3

🙏 Prayer Requests:

- Praise to God for providing for me every step of the way to Japan - from reaching my fundraising goal to blessing me with the prayers, encouragement, and support from my beloved friends and family!
- Prayer for safety as we fly to Japan (we land in Narita at ~4AM EST June 25) and safety from any sickness and health issues throughout our trip.
- Prayer for protection from spiritual warfare in all its forms (eg: the Darkness that can randomly cause me to think extremely negatively about myself, and sexual temptations which may manifest differently in Japan).
- Prayer for a focused mind and heart to give my undivided attention to Jesus, Japan, and my team in the coming weeks, including being F.A.S.T. (Flexible, Available, Sacrificial, Teachable).
- Prayer for our team (me, Quach, Lucy, Anne, Anita, Will) to bond deeper in unity and get along well throughout any conflicts and challenges we may face together *(John 17:20-23)*.

Here we are at the end of another letter! I took more liberty in writing longer because I don't know when I'll get a chance to write another. If you read all the way through, I hope it was a blessing and encouragement to you in some way! Our team will be staying in Ichikawa, east of Tokyo, and we will be visiting multiple churches, homeless and children ministries, and meeting with missionaries. As a reminder, this mission trip is a "prayer journey," meaning an observationship where the focus is on watching and listening rather than doing. I'm excited to share with you what happens! While you may not be physically going to Japan with us, you are going with us in spirit and I'm so grateful for that! As I begin my short term mission trip, I recall the words of another man that has greatly inspired me: *"Jesus asks nothing of us without giving us the strength to perform it" (Dietrich Bonhoeffer in The Cost of Discipleship)*. Maybe that can resonate with you as well :) Thanks for reading and journeying alongside me. You are loved ❤️‍🩹

Kill The Flesh,
Jaime

Letter 8: Beneath The Surface (June 28, 2024)

"What just happened?" Me and Will say the exact same words as we collapse onto our beds like corpses after a long day in Tokyo. We're starting our fifth day in Japan, and those three words still describe how I feel about this mission trip so far…

Genki! I am still mindblown when I walk the streets of Ichikawa and eat so many new foods (how could I be tasting something I've never tasted in my life *every* meal? And why is it always so freaking good?!). My mind is literally expanding. I'm on the opposite side of the planet! I'm in Japan!!! So crazy. It's like a dream. The architecture is stunning, even the plants and trees are new. Everyone is dripped out, and even the toilets are cool. Everyday I'm awestruck by everything I'm experiencing - including the bread for breakfast! However, while Japan is no doubt a beautiful place, beneath the surface there is more. A train stops as another person commits suicide, a drunk guy stumbles by us in the dimly lit street, *hikikomori* shut themselves off from society for 20+ years, and pornographic material is easily accessible in the local 7-11.

Look out over Ichikawa and Tokyo (left) // Shibuya Crossing in Tokyo (right)

As we see thousands upon thousands cross the famous Shibuya Crossing, help out with a homeless ministry in the night, and visit a Buddhist temple among hundreds of others, I can't help but have a heavy heart as I stand in a packed train with the people I've been praying for for months. It is eye opening and humbling. While we have many laughs together as a team and enjoy the Japanese experiences around us, this is still a mission trip and prayer journey. And I would have never guessed how exhausting it would be physically, mentally, and spiritually. So much is happening, I barely have time to process, leaving me to think "What just happened?"

Homeless ministry with Ethan, Pyeonghwa & Gangsan (left) // Sensoji: Asakusa Kannon Temple (right)

🙏 Prayer Requests:

- Prayer for health - I'm tired and can't sleep well (I'm writing this letter at 6am after laying on my bed for an hour sleepless). I'm also fighting stomach issues, dehydration, and heat exhaustion, and probably other problems that have caused great discomfort. Prayer for me to find joy in the suffering and wait on God.
- Prayer for an open heart posture to what God wants to teach and show me here in Japan. I'm learning a lot but still feel like I don't know what's happening as everything is so fast paced.
- Prayer for a focused mind to give my undivided attention to Jesus, Japan, and my team, including being F.A.S.T. (Flexible, Available, Sacrificial, Teachable).
- Prayer for our team (me, Quach, Lucy, Anne, Anita, Will) to bond deeper in unity and get along well throughout any conflicts and challenges we may face together *(John 17:20-23)*.

I know this letter feels like it barely taps into the wealth of lessons and experiences so far, and I wish I could write more, but I don't have the time. God is working on my heart and I can't even imagine what more will happen next. We're in Japan until July 9, so I'm pretty hyped. Thanks for praying and encouraging me, I'm grateful for your continual support. I hope everything back home is well, I haven't forgotten you in my own prayers :) *Kami sama wa anata o aishiteimasu* 💔

Kill The Flesh,
Jaime

Letter 9: Days Of Darkness (July 2, 2024)

Genki! I'm trying to whip up a quick prayer letter for you, but honestly don't know what to write. So much is going on while there's still so much more to process. I'll just resort to being vague to give you a general idea of how I'm doing. sorry not sorry :P

After being sick from stomach afflictions for almost 3 days, I pretty much lost motivation and low key thought in the back of my head, "I hope I never have to come back to Japan." I didn't think I'd be such an op, but it's probably also culture shock doing its thing. As I looked out over the Shibuya Crossing on day 3, I tried to pray but felt such a disconnect from these people due to the language and culture, I found myself thinking, "These aren't my people, this isn't my land."

But in my stomach pains and frustrations, I was forced to slow down and consider the intricacies and intentionality behind the ways in which God *was* working during our trip. Could I just open my eyes and not always overlook the details? Could I notice how maybe all the "coincidences" aren't just coincidences?

For 6 days, I really didn't know what was going on or why I was here. But on the seventh day, "things happened" which shifted my perspective. No time to explain, but let's just say I prayed for a "fleece." God's *been* working. Scripture is becoming alive. Prayer is becoming more real than ever before. While I'm an alien in a foreign land, these are my people now. Because if God calls anyone to be a part of his family, then even Japan is His people. And if Japan is His people, then they are also my people.

🙏 Prayer Requests:

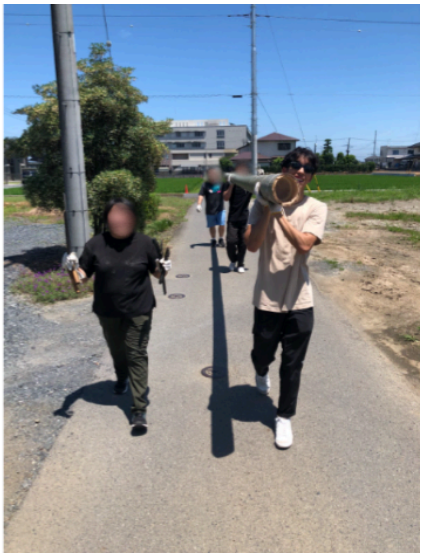
- Praise to God for restoring my health from the stomach illnesses - it was brutal but I'm glad I'm 90% okay now after blowing up a few washrooms :)
- Prayer for an open heart posture to what God wants to teach and show me here in Japan. I'm humbly praying for more confirmation by God's grace.
- Prayer that I can be faithful in the little things (eg: praying for those around me on the train rides).
- Prayer for a focused mind to give my undivided attention to Jesus, Japan, and my team, including being F.A.S.T. (Flexible, Available, Sacrificial, Teachable).
- Prayer for our team (me, Quach, Lucy, Anne, Anita, Will) to bond deeper in unity and get along well throughout any conflicts and challenges we may face together *(John 17:20-23)*.

Sorry, no time to find pictures!!! I'll find time to write letters after the trip too, so I'm sure you'll get to see more of the beautiful land and activities we've been up to, along with the many other lessons God's been teaching me! We're in Japan until July 9, so there's only 6 more days left! Thanks for praying and encouraging me, I read every email, text, and message, even if I don't respond to you cause there's no time. Just know I deeply appreciate you, and I do not take your efforts for granted. *Kami sama wa anata o aishiteimasu* ❤️‍🩹

Kill The Flesh,
Jaime

Letter 10: Fantastic Four (July 7, 2024)

The time is near… I don't know how, but there's only 2 days left before we hop on a plane back to Canada. So much has happened - good and bad - that I'm still not fully sure why I was here and what's next (although in a way I kind of do…). Since the last update, we visited more churches, talked and prayed with more missionaries, helped out at another homeless ministry, and even cut down a bamboo tree for a pastor!



Chapel of Adoration (left) // Praying at Skytree (middle) // 2.5 hours to harvest a bamboo tree (right)

While I was wondering for months about what I could possibly do for Japan on a "prayer journey," I learned the importance and power of prayer as well as the value of "being" rather than "doing." Limited by the language barrier, I wondered how I could help out with anything. But when the people we meet cry because they are so encouraged by our presence, or when someone says we are the long awaited answer to their prayers, you start to see how God has been working in the background, and how there was nothing I "did" yet God still worked through me. Maybe sometimes we just gotta show up and be faithful in the little things…

Sakuragawa Christ Church (left) // Ice cream with Gangsan and Pyeonghwa (right)

🙏 Prayer Requests:

- Prayer for an open heart posture to what God wants to show me in the last couple days.
- Prayer that I can find comfort in God amidst culture shock.
- Prayer for a focused mind to give my undivided attention to Jesus, Japan, and my team.
- Prayer for our team (me, Quach, Lucy, Anne, Anita, Will) to bond deeper in unity *(John 17:20-23)*.
- Prayer for safety as we fly back to Canada on July 9 (we land in Toronto at ~11PM EST July 9). That will be the longest day ever because we get to go back in time lol.

Jesus Christ Family Church with Pastor Ohashi (left) // Ropeway at Mount Tsukuba (right)

And that's it for now! This is truly just a glimpse of what I've been learning and experiencing. I can't wait to share with you everything else :)) Thanks again for praying and encouraging me, every email, text, and message is such a blessing, you have no idea. And my gratitude to all those who gave financially to make this trip happen, I wouldn't be here without you. Exploring Japan and experiencing God everyday with my team, the Fantastic Four, has been such a joy. And we're not done yet! Bless God. Delight in the Lord. *Kami sama wa anata o aishiteimasu* ❤️‍🩹

Kill The Flesh,
Jaime

Letter 11: Interlude (July 11, 2024)

Hi again!

I hope you've been doing well wherever God is placing you in this season! I wanted to let you know that I have landed safely in Canada, praise God! These past 2 weeks in Japan have been such a blessing. I've said it before but I'll say it again, I'm seriously so grateful for each of you who have partnered with me financially and/or in prayer! Your words of encouragement strengthened my spirit when times got tough.

❤️❤️❤️

Before you approach me to ask what happened in Japan, I wanted to make a request. Please graciously give me some time to process the mission trip before I share with you my experiences and takeaways. It may take one week or maybe one month, but I'd rather reflect, process, and pray through everything than just share random, incoherent, and unconnected thoughts. Hope that makes sense. Don't worry, the time will come 😊

Thanks for journeying with me in such a wonderful part of my life. May your knowledge and experience of the Father grow ever deeper and richer as you wait for and with Him. He is always faithful.

Kill The Flesh,
Jaime

Tokyo, Japan. A picture that means nothing to you, but so much to me.

Letter 12: Abide (July 24, 2024)

8AM at Toronto airport (left) // Anne, Will, Quach, me, Lucy, Anita ready to fly to Japan on June 24 (right)

~ Part I. Op.

So annoying. Why am I even here? Just bring me back home. I don't want to ever come back to Japan. I press a button on the keypad beside me and water blasts up my cheeks. I scramble for over a minute before finally finding the off button for the bidet. *Japan sucks.*

I move through the crowd, taking a sip of a green drink. *Huh, this is what my cousin was talking about…* I put on my headphones to silence the annoying buzz of humans around me, and I look out through the window. Thousands of people - *like ants* - walked in all directions. Shibuya. Quach and Lucy told us to take time to pray for Japan. I sat down, flipping through the pages of *Beneath The Surface*, a prayer book for Japan. But an hour passed and I couldn't even pray. *These aren't even my people or my land. Why am I even here?* I ended up praying but felt so disconnected from the people and their needs. However, my heart did start to feel heavy. *Why do I feel kinda sad for them?* Is that the right judgement to have (eg: compassion) or do these feelings of concern merely come from intercultural differences where I don't really understand them and maybe even think that I'm better than them? *I mean, there's a freaking window between us! I literally can't do anything for them even if I really had a heart for them!*

I stalk up the stairs following the team, already winded as I step up on the platform - fatigue hitting me like a *shinkansen*. *Stupid pillow, can't even sleep properly - on top of the jet lag!* I cram into the train - surrounded by people like sardines in a can. I stand beside a woman reading manga on her phone. More people jam their way in at the next stop. *Bruh. Just one more hour...* I finally get off the train! And into the thick, humid, hot air. I can barely breathe as is. *Is it just me or does the air smell weird?* We help out at the homeless ministry. Except I don't do a thing. Some lady shares a sermon, but I can't understand a word - just *"kami sama wa"* every now and then. *At least I know they're talking about God.* I shuffle around, my feet killing me. *Can't I just sit down?* I just can't wait to leave. *Why am I even here?* I look up at a guy in a blue shirt - Owen, a 21 year old from Taiwan studying in Japan for the summer. *Why is this guy smiling all the time? He's not even doing anything!! Why does he waste his time coming out each week? Am I missing something?*

The days pass. We visit the temple of the goddess of mercy. I get tempted to buy charms (I MEAN WHAT? definitely looking just for recon purposes). We look for souvenirs for

financial/prayer partners. We meet a pastor with some majestic hair. Lucy scolds me and calls me a “child.” We watch people and take notes like PI’s. We meet and talk with missionaries. We eat some amazing food (*omurice* was fire). We decompress - except me (AH! sorry again Anne LOL). Each night, I collapse onto my bed after praying the Psalms with Will. *What just happened?* There’s no time to reflect. Everything happens so quickly. *God, what are you trying to show me? Why am I even here? You lost me. Japan is not it.*

I stroll into the Chapel of Adoration. *With a polo noicely tucked!* Koyuki is preaching and Soya translates for us. But I don’t hear a word. I’m zoning in and out, and I’m just trying to stay awake while I sweat from the heat. *Can this pew be any more uncomfortable?* I hear something about a burning bush *(huh?)*, possibly the words: “do not fear to follow God’s call,” and something about Jesus coming down *(from where or why, I have no clue)*. Definitely missed the main points. *Whatever. My stomach is about to kill me!* So for dinner, I chose the washroom. But I ended up being constipated. *NOICE.* My stomach pains were bringing me into another dimension as my mental focus faded in and out. I left the team and walked back to the OMF guest home with Lucy. *Longest walk ever.*

“How are you doing so far?” We sat down at the meal table, and I took a bite out of a cucumber.

“Besides feeling like I’m dying, I don’t even know what’s going on. So much is happening so quickly, I have no time to process. I don’t even know why I’m here. I don’t know what God’s trying to tell me. I’m waiting for Him to give me some big moment or *something*, but there’s nothing these past 6 days.”

“You’re not seeing it. Did you notice anything about today?”

“No.”

“The devo? John 1:1-14? Jesus and the Incarnation? We didn’t plan to do the devos during the mission trip or even plan to schedule it for this exact day, yet it aligned with Koyuki’s sermon where she talked about the parallel of God coming down to save Israel through Moses in Exodus 3 and Jesus coming down to save us through the Incarnation.”

Huh.

“Do you remember when we wondered how Japanese Christians might embody the Incarnation of Jesus? And then we ended up in the “Voice of Adoration” choir concert where we witnessed the deep passion, joy, and love for God by the Japanese people?”

Huh.

“Did you notice all the other small things throughout the past week where God was working?”

“I mean I noticed some things, but they can just be coincidences. I can’t know for sure.”

Lucy pointed out a *bunch* more examples from the week. Like a *bunch*. “Don’t think coincidences are just coincidences. God is an intentional God, so you have to start to see the intentionality in the small things He does. Stop waiting for the big things and overlooking everything else God is doing. God is speaking through the whispers, you just need the

awareness to listen."

That night, Lucy shared with me so much wisdom. We kinda talked about everything. This was one of the key turning points of the trip for me. After this, I slowed down and became more aware of what God was doing in the intricacies of each day.

Matcha at Shibuya Crossing (left) // Homeless ministry with Owen (middle) // Chapel of Adoration (right)

Time Out!

Wooooowww. Who would have known I'd be Japan's biggest op? Ok ok maybe some of you did 😱 Nevermind that! 😳 We are now 6 days into Japan, and let me tell you, the last half of the trip was jam packed with life changing conversations, spirit moving prayers, fiery "Gatsby's", and extremely intimate moments I thought I'd only experience when I'm married! Ahhh, (un)fortunately for you, I won't explain that last one 😊 but you can ask me in person… 😬 ??? ha. 😅

I know this prayer letter is longer than my Sport Medicine research paper, but I thought why not? It's my last one! (I was also inspired by Anita hehe) I mean, I could quickly tell you my takeaways and lessons, but that's no fun! Did you want me to say that I learned about compassion, prayer, and discernment, and that's it? Anyone could say that. Instead, I want you to experience Japan as I did (that's why you see so much italics, which I hope you've now caught on that those are my in-the-moment thoughts). So without further ado, let's jump back into the story - oh wait, Quach wants you to drink some water first. Ok sweet! Let's continue!

~ Part II. Heart.

I told you this mission trip is a prayer journey, right? I mentioned it in Letters 6, 7, 8, and 10. But you're probably still wondering, "What does that even mean?" Well, it's exactly what it sounds like - we go and we pray. "But can't you just stay in Canada and pray? Why do you have to go all the way to Japan?" LOL! Me and the other students wondered the same thing in an Ikea long ago. Even during the trip, I doubted the purpose and value of a prayer journey. I mean, I was the member of the team going through culture shock, just hating on Japan for the majority of the trip (I remember vividly hoping that God never calls me to be a long term

missionary in Japan)! I didn't see the point of some of the things we did. But like my sister in Christ, Deborah, told us, "It's an observationship." We're not here to build a church or start some new program or feed the 5000 or send pigs off a cliff. Without knowing the language and staying for only 2 weeks, our impact for evangelism is very limited as we're constrained when it comes to building relationships. Instead, for a prayer journey, we are called to pray for, watch, listen to, encourage, and learn from local churches, missionaries, and the public. It's a very different type of mission trip compared to the norm, and it's hard to show you how valuable and impactful it can be unless you experience it yourself. My hope is that by the end of this prayer letter, you will recognize the "efficacy" of a prayer journey as you witness my struggles and see how God gradually shapes and transforms my heart.

Fantastic Four + Quach & Lucy on June 27 (left) // BTS: 10PM Budgeting on June 28 (right)

"Had good sleep and took a dump finally, praise God for constipation pills." That's word for word what I wrote in my journal for July 1. And praise God! You have no idea how good that felt. When you're dying for 3 days on a mission trip in Japan, it's extremely miserable, discouraging, and demotivating. But it helped me understand my brother in Christ back home who suffered from an untimely malady in Europe (btw, I love you bro). He definitely had it worse, so there's lots to be grateful for. The sickness also helped put me in the right heart posture for the rest of the trip. In my weakness, I turned to Hudson Taylor's chapter 13 "Days Of Darkness" and verses like 2 Corinthians 12:9 and Luke 16:10-12. When you are limited by cultural misunderstanding, language barrier, and physical illness, the only thing you can do is lean on God. I always wanted to "do" things to help out, but it was a prayer journey - there's not much "doing." THAT IS SO HARD TO GRASP, YOU HAVE NO IDEA. Maybe we just subconsciously link our identity to our ability and performance, so that when we're called to "do nothing" it really makes us question our value and purpose. Learning to give up control and trust God was vital, and this stomach illness forced me to do so at a deeper level. Lucy encouraged me to "be faithful in the little things." Sometimes God calls us to do nothing but pray. And we have to be faithful in that one task, trusting that God is working everything else according to His will. But like I said, this was hard to grasp, and you'll see me wrestle with this throughout the trip.

"... often sick in body as well as perplexed in mind and embarrassed by circumstances - had not the Lord been specially gracious to me, had not my mind been sustained by the conviction that the work is His and that He is with me… I must have fainted or broken down. But the battle is the Lord's, and He will conquer. We may fail - do fail continually - but He never fails." (Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret pg. 154)

Me dying off (left) // ~~7-Eleven~~ 7 & i Holdings (middle) // 500 yen (~$5) ramen (right)

Tokyo Skytree. It was time to pray for Japan with Will. But I was thinking and worrying about my own problems more than Japan's! An hour and a half later, the "barista" at a coffee roaster came to mind. While some of you know I was in awe of his head shape and bone structure, I was also in awe of what he symbolized for Japan's culture and focus on mastery and discipleship. With Japan's commitment, craftsmanship, and discipline, what could that eventually mean for Christian discipleship? All of a sudden, me and Will were envisioning the future. As we looked out at the city that went on and on into the horizon, we recalled all the things we've learned about the culture and spiritual climate of Japan. My eyes were opened. When we prayed, it felt real. For the first time, there was no dissonance. *These were my people.* Now *a lot* happened here that I didn't mention - probably one of the biggest spiritual experiences of my life. God changed my heart in such an intense way, my whole perspective in life shifted. I won't share what happened because it just won't make sense to you. I mean, if a fleece is either wet or dry, does it matter? It's kinda stupid, right? Nice. See what I mean?

Leaves Roaster (left) // Skytree lookout over Tokyo (middle) // *Yakisoba* - my favorite meal (right)

As I stepped into the train, I slipped away from my team and looked at the people around me. My mind was silent. No more judgement. No more complaining. I looked at a young man watching a League of Legends stream on his phone. I moved closer to a woman who was texting someone - all in Japanese. A business man slept in the seat over. My eyes scanned the rest of the train car, peeking into the next one which was full as well. Observing facial expressions and body postures, my heart urged me to enter a time of prayer, interceding for each person around me. I recalled Mark 6:26-46. Jesus doesn't look at a crowd like he's seeing a bunch of ants and go on His way, ignoring what He saw. He comes down from Skytree level to see the people at their level. He sees each individual. He freely gives His time and energy for each one. He understands each one because He *became* like one of them. That's compassion.

"When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things." (Mark 6:34)

Ginza train platform at night (left) // Fish market (middle) // Reading Hudson Taylor in the train 😂 (right)

~ Part III. Fly.

I tied my *obi* around my *yukata* and sat in the dark room. *Foreigner.* Gawvi's new album Atmostfear played in the background. *Useless.* I turned on Instagram. *Nice. Making me feel more self-conscious and inadequate.* I toss my phone onto the mat and turn towards the window, gazing out at my city illuminated against the night sky. *Why do I feel so crappy?*

I recounted the churches we visited, the pastors we talked to and learned from… Many of these churches had less than 20 members. The pastors were often 60+ years old with no one to step up and lead after them. Young people often leave the church after high school when they have no Christian friends or when other responsibilities take priority. Inviting others to church or discipleship groups feels invasive and risky in their culture. Evangelism is unheard of to some members. Through our conversations, we saw how the pastors have been faithfully sowing seeds for decades without seeing any fruit.

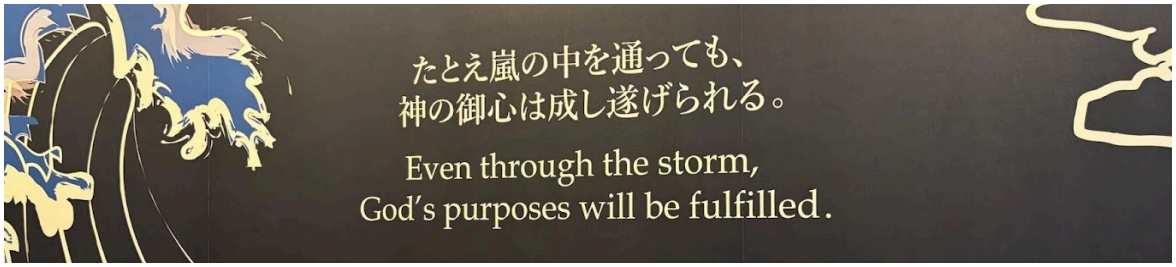
But it wasn't just the churches that were struggling. Japanese work culture is busy and stressful - people have no time to see their kids, much less to go to church. They unwind by spending time at nightclubs, love hotels, drinking, or gambling. People often "live life alone," going to the theater or restaurants by themselves. We walked through Ginza to get a glimpse of

the nightlife. I passed by a convenience store and watched as people checked out explicit magazines on display. We watched as hundreds bought charms and performed rituals at the Buddhist temple. I walked by a drunk woman stumbling past me at night. In these moments, I found myself wondering what I could do. *I'm freaking useless. Foreigner.*

I follow Quach and Lucy as they lead us to the next train platform. *I couldn't help at the homeless ministry. I couldn't help harvesting the damn bamboo tree. I can't even help my team with navigation.* While my heart softened with compassion for Japan, each day I was reminded of my weaknesses and shortcomings. I wanted to do something but felt so restricted and useless. *I can't even talk out loud in public without Lucy giving me a death stare.* (I love you Lucy 🥰)

Quach hits me in the shoulder and I look back. "Just be." "What?" *I'm present - I'm listening to Lucy, what do you want?* Lucy shared that just by listening and praying for Yuko, she made Yuko cry and joyfully thank her. Even the "Pure One" told us that seeing OMF missionaries was a long awaited answer to his prayers! Just our mere presence was such a big encouragement to the local Christians and missionaries at Sakuragawa Christ Church. I then remembered Stefan who I prayed with, saying he was deeply encouraged by me - words I was quick to ignore at first. Once again, I was overlooking the small things God was doing. "Just be. You don't have to 'do' anything." *Huh, that's what Quach means. Maybe even in all my weaknesses, God is still working to bring everything together. Without me knowing, through just my presence and prayers, He uses me to reach His people.* God was uprooting my beliefs again, teaching me that it's not about what I do, but what He does - I just have to be completely open to being used as His vessel. I might be a fly on the wall, but God is in the room.

Will's climbing skills (left) // Quach & Lucy doing their thang (middle) // Mt Tsukuba Ropeway (right)



Ways To Pray For The Japanese Church

- Pray that the Spirit will move powerfully in children's summer programs (eg: Mito City Church, Minori Camp, Green Line Outreach).
- Pray that God will provide abundantly to new church plants who face financial hardships (eg: Sakuragawa Christ Church).
- Pray that OMF missionaries remain encouraged and steadfast, connecting deeper with the wider missionary community.

Interior of Mito Church (left) and Jesus Christ Family Church (right) - very small rooms!

~ Part IV. Voice.

Our van pulls away from Mito Church and we continue to wave to Pastor Kasabi and his wife Mizuku (I definitely misheard and misspelled their names 😖). They *continue* to wave back for like *2 minutes* as we slowly drive away and they become specks in the distance. *They literally walked onto the road so they could wave at us for longer LOL!* I settle into my seat, wondering how many more churches we'll visit where I just zone out the whole time. Feels bad, but it's impossible for me to listen and focus when they're speaking Japanese even with a translator.

I entered Saitama International Church, pondering personal problems as well as how long it will take before my drowsiness takes me out. But as I stood up for worship, my world flipped upside down. We started singing "One Voice" (Marty Nystrom) in Japanese:

"Father we ask of You this day / Come and heal our land / Knit our hearts together / That Your glory may be seen in us / Then the world will know / That Jesus Christ is Lord / Let us be One Voice, / that glorifies Your name / Let us be One Voice, declaring that You reign / Let us be One Voice, / in love and harmony / And we pray O God, grant us unity."

As they started to sing in English, I took in the lyrics, looking at the adults and children alike singing joyfully. It was beautiful. I may or may not have shed a few tears.

As I reflect on these times of worship in Japan, including Cornerstone Church's YouTube worship and the Voice of Adoration choir, I experienced the unity of the family of God as we sang loudly and passionately. For a while, I saw the West and Japan as "us and them."

“Graveyard of missions.” But the Japanese Christians aren’t much different than us. In worship, it was like a glimpse into eternity where one day we will *all* stand *together* and sing praises to God *(Revelation 7:9-10)*. Time and time again, God was uprooting my narrow minded perspectives. While at Skytree, Japan felt like “my people” in the way a shepherd connects with his flock. Now, Japan feels like “my people” in the sense that we are all one flock following one Shepherd. Compassion took on a new dimension…

Cornerstone Tokyo with 3 of my biggest inspirations (left) // Saitama International Church service (right)

~ Part V. Courage.

My heart was shaped day by day. Prayer took on a new depth. Compassion for Japan and the lost touched my innermost being. Trusting God became more real and tangible than ever before. There was no way I could return home and act as if I were the same person, doing nothing differently.

I think I know what I need to do now. How many “coincidences” do I need before I just trust God’s confirmations and step forward to where God is calling me? “Be bold,” Stefan said. *How many people do I need to run into on this mission trip where they talk about discernment without me asking, and it’s like they’re giving me answers to exactly what I’m wrestling with?* “Don’t be afraid to follow God’s call,” Koyuki said. *But they can just be coincidences.* “You’ve got to take that word out of your vocabulary,” Lucy said. *But I need more confirmation to discern.* “There are no coincidences, everything aligns with God’s will,” Jing Jing said. “God’s not trying to trick you, He’ll make it clear, you just need faith,” Kat said. “Don’t run from where God is calling you,” our Jonah devo said. *Okokok I trust you God. You made it clear.*

I set my jaw and sat down across from Alexis. *It’s the last day, let’s make it count. We’re not gonna ask anyone about discernment. We’re trusting in God with that. We’re at peace now.* “Alexis, what was your discernment process like? *[cough]* I mean, um, how is it being a missionary in Japan? What has God been teaching you?”

I learned that Alexis finished her masters, when suddenly God called her to China, and she *immediately* left for 4 years. Then God called her to Japan, helming a new ministry focused on reaching the Chinese diaspora in Japan (cool!). She wrestled with thinking, “Am I missing out by choosing God?” and “I feel behind, is following God really worth it?” She mentioned Psalm 73 of Asaph, and told me how God slowly shaped her heart - stripping everything away until she had only God to lean on to satisfy all her needs. *Jeez.*

We left and walked through the streets of Ichikawa with a horde of other OMF missionaries, arriving at Saizeriya for dinner. “Sisters! I know I’ve seen you so many times, but we never got a chance to talk! Would you be down to sit at the same table?” 3 hours later and I look at Will, “What is happening?” Stella and Nadine just shared some of the craziest stories I’ve ever heard in my life. I just couldn’t wrap my head around it all. Their steps of faith were so extreme, and the things God used them to do were beyond incredible. Simply put, no human could have done what they did. *How?* “How are you so strong in your faith?” Stella and Nadine smiled and said, “We’re just normal humans, but actually weaker and less courageous, which makes us rely on God more for strength.” *No. Words.*

“I think I know what I need to do.” It’s 2-4AM, and me and Will went to the rooftop to pray. “God is calling me, I just have to trust Him and have faith like Alexis, Stella, and Nadine. But if I’m wrong in my discernment, then what can I make of all the experiences in Japan? Everything falls apart.” … *“You’ll never know until you take the risk.” Freaking old man… no one asked. Not even Stella lol.*

Fire conversations with Stella and Nadine! (left) // Meg on the far left with everyone else :) (right)

~ Part VI. Abide.

I sat down on a bench in the rain, breathing in the nice Canadian air. It’s been a week since Japan. And I’m living in fear. God had confirmed to me my calling several days before. I wanted confirmation and I got it, but it just opened a can of worms. How would I have known that clarity *isn’t* the solution to my problems? I thought I’d stop worrying, but I’m *still* worrying!

How am I going to do any of this? This is impossible. What if my discernment is all wrong? How do I make the right choice? I open my umbrella. *God if you’re calling me to do this, then why don’t I feel like you’re with me right now? “If you go with me, I will go; but if you don’t go with me, I won’t go” (Judges 4:8). I can’t do this alone. I need you.*

I got up at 2-4AM, unable to sleep. *You tell me to abide in you, but where are you?* I opened my Bible searching for answers. Then, I picked up *Hudson Taylor’s Spiritual Secret*, re-read “The Exchanged Life” chapter, and prayed.

Some time later, I experienced the biggest spiritual experience in my life. If I was to try to explain it to you, it wouldn’t make sense. There were hundreds of different things from over the years that connected and finally made sense. My mind expanded as God brought clarity and

understanding. The peace I felt transcended all understanding, *infinitely* greater than any peace that I experienced before. Joy abounded. Every word that Hudson Taylor wrote in that chapter became real at the level of my soul. I asked “Where are you?” but I found out that He *is* with me. He is *in* me. I was abiding in Christ. I’ve *been* abiding. *It’s all actually possible.*

Maybe this is what happens when God uproots everything you hold onto tightly - you’re stripped naked with no other choice to surrender and lean on God. You’re forced to trust Him for your every need at every moment. And when you do the impossible that He called you to, your only response is to give glory to Him because you were and had nothing to begin with. The cost of discipleship is so high, I wanted to run away like Jonah. But by His grace, He confirmed His call for me again and again like He did for Gideon. And even as I worry about the *how*, deep down I know I must faithfully step forward into the unknown like Abraham. I want to be understood, I want comfort, I want stability. But Jesus said, *“Whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it” (Matthew 16:25)*. Even Bonhoeffer said, *“When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”* I’m still scared, but now I know that the same God that faithfully provided for my brothers and sisters in Japan is the same God that abides in me. *“Be bold.” “Take heart.” “Do not be afraid.”*

“I am no longer anxious about anything as I realize this; for He, I know, is able to carry out His will, and His will is mine. It makes no matter where He places me, or how. That is rather for Him to consider than for me; for in the easiest position He must give me His grace, and in the most difficult His grace is sufficient… So if God should place me in serious perplexity, must He not give me much guidance; in positions of great difficulty, much grace; in circumstances of great pressure and trial, much strength? No fear that His resources will prove unequal to the emergency! And His resources are mine, for He is mine, and is with me and dwells in me.” (Hudson Taylor’s Spiritual Secret pg. 165)

The team with Susan at I Link Tower (left) // The team with Jordan at OMF Guest Home (right)

“In the gospels the very first step a man must take is an act which radically affects his whole existence.” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer in The Cost of Discipleship pg. 65)

~ Part VII. TLDR.

"Too long; didn't read." I wouldn't blame you. Here's a bullet point list of my takeaways:

- Experienced the power of prayer
- Learned what it means to really trust in God
- Developed real compassion
- Wrestled with how to wait on God and discern God's voice
- Learned how to be truly courageous in my faith
- Experienced abiding in Jesus

The best team I could ask for to go on a mission trip with! ❤️ ❤️ ❤️ ❤️ ❤️

~ PART VIII. Gratitude.

That's the end of *Tales From Japan*. If you read this whole prayer letter, just wow✨🤩✨! Writing personally allowed me to fully process and reflect on the trip. There's actually a *ton* of easter eggs in the word choices, order of stories, and descriptions of things. But you don't have to get the references, I just genuinely pray that God was able to meet you where you are. Know that you don't need to embark on a mission trip to serve God. The question isn't necessarily "Where can I serve God?" because you can serve Him wherever you are - whether in your hometown or abroad. The real question is: "Are you willing to sacrifice money, family, dreams, and more to serve His Kingdom?" *I sound like Mark Comer…*

Thank you again for journeying alongside me. Your prayers and encouragement were *felt* 😘. Thank you to those who took a chance in investing in me - giving generously so I can go to Japan. I know I'm not your #1 pick, and heck, after reading this letter you're probably thinking, "What a complaining bum." You're so right HAHA love 🫶. *Arigato gozaimasu* to my team: Quach, Lucy, Anita, Anne, and Will. I love each of you dearly, you were so loving and kind to me, putting up with my sass and dap ups. We've come such a long way! 🥰😳

Breakfast at the OMF Guest Home (left) // Fukagawa Edo Museum with Kat! (right)

Now that you've read this letter, you probably have more questions than answers. "What happened at Skytree?" "What is God calling you to do?" "What actually happened when you realized you were abiding in Christ?" A lot of threads are left hanging, and sorry, I'm leaving them to hang. 14 pages to read is painful enough, I'm sure! To be honest, I probably only talked about 50% of what happened in Japan! I guess you can interrogate me when you see me in person, but… no promises I'll let you in on all my secrets. You can try tho! 😉

As you move on, don't feel pressured to pray for 8 hours a day, go to the other side of the planet on a mission, wake up at 2-4AM to spend time with God, write 42 pages worth of mission trip prayer letters, or become Hudson Taylor's #1 fan. I recognize that I'm extreme in many ways, and I'm by no means saying these are the only ways to live a life pleasing to God. I'm just very unorthodox and like to do things my own way. I'll let George Verwer argue for me though: *"For some who read this, Hudson Taylor will come across as extreme, and yet history shows that when God is birthing something new and unique He often chooses people who seem - or are - extreme to make it happen."*

Okay seeya, cheeko. Feel free to reach out if you ever want to talk to me more about Japan or anything in life. *Kami sama wa anata o aishiteimasu* 💔 "God loves you"

Kill The Flesh,
Jaime

Will, Gangsan, Ethan, Pyeonghwa (Peace), me (left) // The team with Priscilla & Susan (right)

Our last meal as a full team (left) // Our last group photo at the airport (right)

~ PART IX. Epilogue.

I'm sat in the train with my suitcase in front of me. My headphones are in with worship music. I look solemnly at each person around me, praying for them. *Prayer journey. I can't do anything for these people but pray. Even if I wanted to do more, I'm leaving today. Would God come and save these people? Or would He just sit and watch?* Yet I knew the answer already. He already came and saved them through Jesus. He does love them. He loves them deeply. *But who will go and tell them about Jesus?* The train passed by buildings, houses, and farms. Next stop: Narita airport. Once again, there was nothing I could do but have faith and trust God. Japan is in His hands, not mine. At least not right now.

"Faith can no longer mean sitting still and waiting - they must rise and follow him. The call frees them from all earthly ties, and binds them to Jesus Christ alone. They must burn their boats and plunge into absolute insecurity in order to learn the demand and the gift of Christ… If men imagine that they can follow Jesus without taking this step, they are deluding themselves like fanatics." (Dietrich Bonhoeffer in The Cost of Discipleship pg. 62-63)